Influence of Social Media on Youth Voting Behaviour: A Systematic Literature Review

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ABSTRACT

This paper delves into the significant impact of social media on the behavior, identity formation, and political involvement of young people, employing a systematic literature review (SLR) as its methodological approach. Social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and Twitter have evolved beyond mere entertainment channels. They now play a crucial role in shaping how youth express their political views, connect with like-minded individuals, and engage in political activities, often circumventing traditional media outlets. By examining existing research, the SLR uncovers prevailing trends and theoretical perspectives, revealing how these platforms contribute to a personalized approach to politics. The review highlights how social media enhances political awareness among young people and affects their voting patterns. The paper identifies several key areas of interest in current research, including how social media facilitates political discussions, fosters community-building, and enables youth to participate in political processes in novel ways. However, it also points out significant gaps in the existing literature, particularly concerning the long-term consequences of social media on political engagement and its ethical dimensions. The review emphasizes the need for ongoing research to fully understand how sustained use of social media platforms influences political behavior over time, and to explore the ethical implications of these interactions. This comprehensive analysis aims to provide a clearer understanding of the complex relationship between social media and youth political engagement, guiding future studies and policy considerations.

Keywords: Systematic Literature Review; Social Media; Voting Behaviour; Political Participation

INTRODUCTION

Social media has become a significant aspect of youth's daily lives, substantially influencing their behaviour, identity, and political engagement. Adolescents are strongly associated with social media platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and Twitter. Not only are they enjoyable for entertainment purposes, but they are also beneficial for discussing politics and developing one's individuality. These platforms provide young individuals with a direct means to express their political opinions without the need for traditional media or political institutions.

Social media's significance in forming young individuals' personalities and communities cannot be overstated. A significant number of young individuals utilise social media platforms to get insights into their own identities and explore various means of self-expression. Additionally, it provides a platform where

individuals may connect with like-minded others who share their interests and actively engage in political and social matters. This environment fosters a sense of inclusion and community, which is particularly crucial for marginalised groups since it provides them with opportunities to engage in public life that were previously inaccessible. Studies have demonstrated that creating and utilising media can enhance the critical thinking abilities and community engagement of young individuals. Engaging in this activity can improve their understanding of political issues and their contribution to the democratic process.

This study uses the systematic literature review (SLR) methodology to achieve our purpose. Systematic literature reviews are fundamental to research, offering a rigorous and comprehensive synthesis of existing knowledge on a specific topic (Xiao & Watson, 2019). Unlike traditional literature reviews, they follow a predefined protocol to minimize bias and ensure replicability (Tahamtan & Bornmann, 2019). This methodology allows us to thoroughly examine relevant literature, resulting in several benefits. Given this information, this review addresses the four main research inquiries: RQ1. What is the scholarly background of the current papers? RQ2. What are the main topics addressed in the papers? Research Question 3. What are the gaps in the current body of literature that need to be addressed, and what are the possible domains for future investigation? By synthesizing findings from the past, this review aims to provide an up-to-date understanding of social media and its influence on voting behaviour, identify research gaps, and guide future research directions. It can be an initial reference for further academic investigations on the subject.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Systematic literature reviews (SLRs) are crucial to investigating the impact of social media on voting behaviour, as both the digital world and the voting process are subject to rapid change. Social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter significantly affect people's attitudes towards politics, their engagement in politics, and their eventual voting behaviour. A systematic approach to analysing the literature enables researchers to integrate the findings of an increasing number of studies, thereby providing them with a comprehensive understanding of the impact of these platforms on electors.

New research indicates that SLRs are required to organise the vast quantity of data and studies that are already available on this topic. For instance, Boulianne (2020) asserts that SLRs are instrumental in identifying patterns, voids, and contradictions within the existing study, which in turn informs future research. By integrating evidence from various studies, SLRs assist us in comprehending the ways in which social media influences voter behaviour. For instance, they demonstrate the mechanisms by which information is disseminated, the operation of echo chambers, and the dissemination of misinformation (Tucker et al., 2021). This comprehensive approach is crucial for researchers and policymakers who seek to comprehend the impact of social media on democratic processes and devise strategies to mitigate its influence.

METHODOLOGY

A systematic literature review (SLR) is a strict, straightforward, and replicated method in social science research that enables academicians to obtain a comprehensive understanding of various works. By methodically accumulating and analyzing pertinent literature, an SLR mitigates bias. Additionally, it provides a robust foundation for comprehending intricate concepts, such as the influence of social media on voting behaviour. This method has gained popularity in recent years due to its ability to identify trends, voids, and theoretical advancements in a variety of social science disciplines (Snyder, 2019; Xiao & Watson, 2019). Paul and Criado (2020) and Paul et al. (2021) argue that comprehensive review studies not only provide individuals with the latest information on a particular subject but also enable researchers to identify gaps in knowledge and explore prospective avenues for future study. Gilal et al. (2023) assert that examining unexplored themes, methodologies, factors, scales, theories, and other aspects through the provided routes enhances our understanding of what actions need to be taken.

According to Sauer and Seuring (2023), researchers often need to adhere to a series of stages and make certain decisions to accomplish this task. Nevertheless, this approach necessitates meticulous scrutiny of its techniques, including an emphasis on localization, an exclusive collection of pertinent data, and the elimination of any subjective components (Paul & Criado, 2020). By systematically analyzing a specific body of literature, it may be feasible to provide an accurate summary that yields an estimation of the overall impact on a research group. Consequently, this may facilitate the creation of a comprehensive overview comprising an ample number of documents about a particular subject (Mishra et al., 2021).

A search was conducted in the Web of Science database using the keywords "social media" and "voting behaviour," resulting in the discovery of 57 publications. The database contains scientific research and other content from renowned scientific journals. Researchers can access the material without charge due to their affiliation with the university. In order to ensure that the systematic review is grounded in the most reliable data, it is imperative to employ rigorous selection criteria (Paul & Criado, 2020). Consequently, we narrowed down the initial pool of 57 publications by using a set of criteria to choose which ones to exclude. The exclusion criteria are: 1. Scholarly publications published in academic journals; 2. Papers written in languages other than English; 3. Papers from disciplines outside of political science, communication, social sciences, arts and humanitarian; 4. Papers that do not primarily examine the impact of social media on voting behaviour.

Researchers can locate a variety of documents, including articles, early articles, and review articles. However, it is advisable to exclude review papers, particularly those that pertain to empirical research that has been peer-reviewed. This is because these types of papers frequently generate biases due to their substantial number of citations. Additionally, process papers are typically excluded from the content because they exhibit novel information that is still in the process of being developed. When they are converted into articles, they may duplicate or summarise the same information (Linnenluecke et al., 2020). Consequently, 8 papers were omitted, which encompassed conference results, books, and book series.

These were not the high-quality papers that academic magazines ensure through the peer-review process. To guarantee that the selection criteria were consistent with the objectives of the investigation, we exclusively examined the social sciences, communication and political sciences. Researchers are required to manually evaluate the previews (title, description, and keywords) of articles that remain after automatic filtration to eliminate unrelated articles that appear due to poor matches (Sauer & Seuring, 2023). Therefore, we reviewed the titles, keywords, and abstracts of all the papers that were still accessible and determined whether they were pertinent to the research subject. The majority of the 16 papers excluded from the study were irrelevant to the research topic. Therefore, the final population consisted of 15 peer-reviewed journal articles that were significant contributions to the research disciplines of the study subject. The entire procedure is depicted in Figure 1, which was generated usingPRISMA (http://prisma-statement.org/).
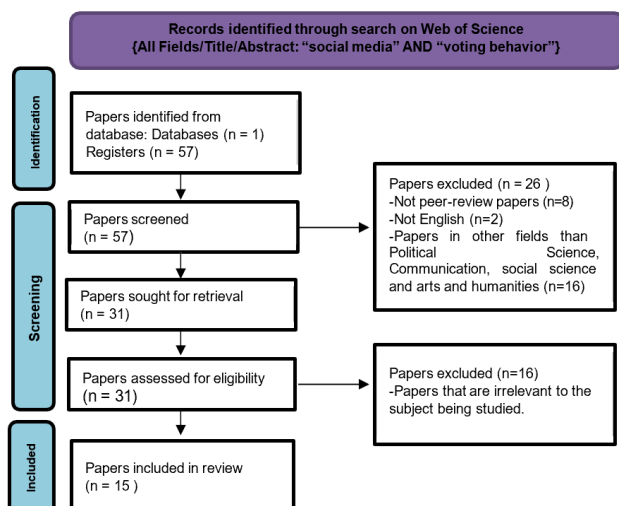

Fig. 1: PRISMA Flowchart of identification and selection criteria

(Source: PRISMA, Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses)

FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

### RQ1: What is the scholarly background of the current papers?

Research Profile

To measure and evaluate the scientific outputs of the chosen papers, it is crucial to categorize bibliometric elements such as publication years, countries of origin, research methods used, journals, and titles and authors (Tranfield et al., 2003). Thus, we seek to answer the following questions to illustrate the general features of the selected papers:

- How many articles were published each year?
- How are the articles distributed across different journals?
- What research orientation is employed in these studies?

Publishing Trend

The study examines a period of ten years, specifically from 2014 to 2024. We examined a total of 15 publications that were published within this specific time frame. Nevertheless, there were no releases in 2015. Figure 2 illustrates the temporal evolution of the selected articles, depicting the changes in their quantity on a yearly basis. The trajectory of publications does not follow a linear trend over time; instead, it culminates in a peak in the years 2022 and 2023. In the years 2022 and 2023, a total of 6 publications were recorded, accounting for 40% of the overall number of publications. The study subject has garnered significant interest over the past five years, indicating a notable expansion in the research domain.
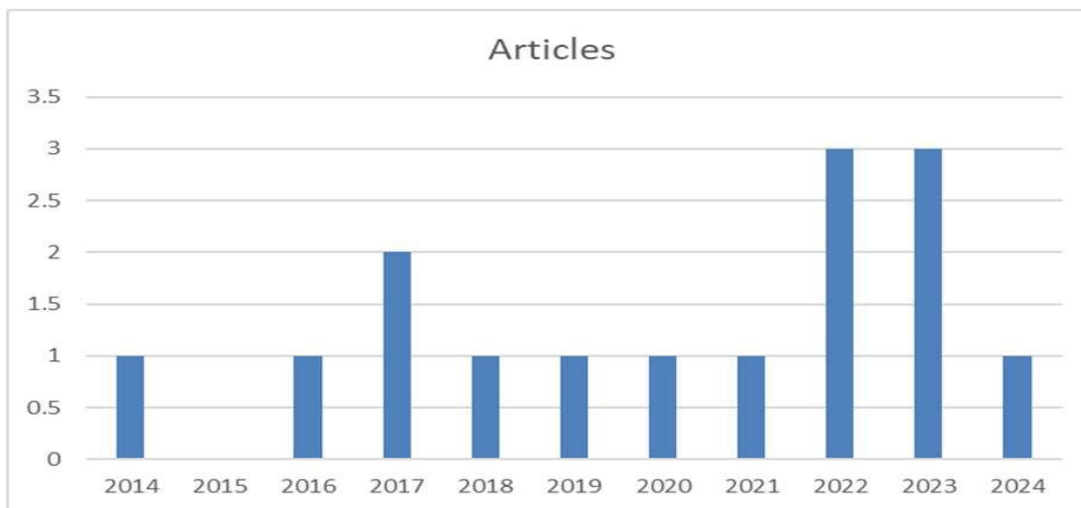
Fig. 2: Publishing Trend

(Source: Author's Research)

Journal Distribution

The analyzed papers were published across 12 distinguished peer-reviewed journals over various years. The Journal of Political Marketing emerges as the leading publication, featuring 3 papers that explore social media political participation. Other journals, despite having high impact factors, also contribute significantly

to the literature on social media and voting behaviour. The distribution of papers across different journals is illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1: Journal Distribution

Journal	No of articles	References
Journal Of Political Marketing	3	Kocaman and Cosgun, (2024), Ben Lazreg andM'Sallem (2023), Subekti et al. (2022)
Annual Review of Economics	1	Zhuravskaya et al. (2020)
British Journal of Political Science	1	Munger et al. (2022)
Communications-European Journal Of Communication Research	1	De Coninck et al. (2023)
Entropy	1	Peruzzi et al. (2018)
Journal Of Communication	1	Haenschen (2016)
Journal Of Information Technology & Politics	1	Kovic et al. (2020)
Nature Communications	1	Eady et al. (2023)
New Media & Society	1	De Zúñiga and Diehl (2019)
Plos One	1	Kristensen et al. (2017)
Political Behavior	1	Spierings and Jacobs (2014)
Social Science Quarterly	1	Gherghina and Rusu (2021)
Swiss Political Science Review	1	Ackermann and Stadelmann-Steffen (2022)

(Source: Author's Research)

The broad spectrum of journals publishing research on this topic is promising for scholars seeking appropriate venues for their manuscripts. As indicated in Table 1, prestigious journals across various disciplines, including political science, such as the Annual Review of Economics, British Journal of Political Science, Communications-European Journal of Communication Research, and Journal of Information Technology & Politics, also publish studies on the interplay between social media and voting behaviour. This highlights the interdisciplinary nature of the topic and underscores the substantial effort required for newcomers to become adept in this field.

Research Orientation

The research methodologies employed in the reviewed publications were evaluated based on the type of analysis conducted. Table 2 displays a comprehensive overview of various kinds of studies, their corresponding analysis, and the requisite sources. Table 2 reveals that thirteen of the studies employ quantitative methodologies, while only two employ qualitative methodologies. This demonstrates that quantitative methodologies are predominant in this field of study. Most quantitative studies employ statistical and economic approaches such as regression, as well as panel surveys. Conversely, in qualitative studies, literature studies and thematic analysis were employed. This review demonstrates the limited adoption of qualitative methods in this discipline despite their ability to enhance our comprehension of the underlying significance of the subjects under investigation.

Table 2: Research orientations

Type of Study	Type of Analysis	References
Empirical	Quantitative	Multinomial logistic regression – De Coninck et al. (2023), Kristensen et al. (2017)
		Three-wave longitudinal survey – Eady et al. (2023)
		Four-wave panel survey – Munger et al. (2022)
		Content analysis – Kovic et al. (2020)
		Three-wave panel survey, regression analysis – Ackermann and Stadelmann-Steffen (2022)
		Correlation analysis data mining – Peruzzi et al. (2018)
		Correlation, regression – Gherghina and Rusu (2021), Spierings and Jacobs (2014), De Zúñiga and Diehl (2019), Zhuravskaya et al. (2020), Kocaman and Co?gun (2024)
		Logistic regression analyses – Haenschen (2016)
Qualitative	Literature study	Subekti et al. (2022)
	Thematic analysis	Ben Lazreg and M'Sallem (2023)

(Source: Author's Research)

RQ2. What are the main topics addressed in the papers?

In recent years, research has increasingly focused on understanding the role of social media and news in shaping political behaviour and electoral outcomes. A body of studies reveals both the significant impacts and notable research gaps in this field.

Social Media's Influence on Political Engagement

Social media platforms have transformed political communication by enhancing the personalization of politics. Spierings and Jacobs (2013) found that while social media does not significantly impact voter turnout, it facilitates a more direct connection between candidates and voters. This personalization potentially increases engagement but does not translate into higher turnout rates. However, their study highlights the need for a more nuanced exploration of social media's interaction with various electoral systems and voter demographics. Additionally, understanding the long-term effects of social media on political engagement beyond short-term election cycles remains a critical research gap.

Munger et al. (2022) discovered that while exposure to information on Twitter correlates with increased political knowledge, it also exposes voters to partisan biases that distort their understanding of critical issues. This manipulation underscores the need for further investigation into the long-term impacts of such biases and how similar dynamics play out across different political contexts and social media platforms.

Kristensen et al. (2017) demonstrated that even minimal interactions, such as a single Facebook like, can significantly predict voting behaviour. This finding emphasizes the potential of social media data in understanding and predicting electoral outcomes. However, the ethical considerations and potential biases associated with using such data require further examination, particularly as privacy concerns and data usage policies evolve.

The Role of News and Information in Political Behavior

The impact of news, particularly concerning data breaches like the Cambridge Analytica case, highlights a significant interaction between news events and financial markets. The increased news flow about such

events can lead to heightened investor apprehension and market volatility. Yet, the focus on a single case study limits the generalizability of these findings. Future research should explore the effects of different types of news on various market sectors and the role of social media in shaping market dynamics.

De Zúñiga and Diehl (2018) found that individuals who perceive news as actively seeking them out are more likely to experience increased political knowledge and interest, potentially boosting voter turnout. This suggests that news consumption habits and individual perceptions play a crucial role in political engagement. However, there is a need for further research to understand how these habits and individual factors interact with political knowledge and turnout.

Echo Chambers and Political Polarization

Ackermann and Stadelmann-Steffen (2022) challenged the notion that online echo chambers strongly influence voting behaviour. Their study found that exposure to diverse viewpoints online is relatively common, even among individuals with strong partisan leanings. This finding indicates that while echo chambers exist, their impact on voting behaviour may be less pronounced than often assumed. Further research is needed to generalize these findings across different contexts and to examine how echo chambers vary across different online platforms and political issues. Coninck et al. (2023) explored how strong anti-immigration sentiments are reinforced through online engagement, translating into offline political action. This research highlights the need to understand the causal mechanisms behind such reinforcement and the potential for online interventions to counter misinformation.

RQ 3. What are the gaps in the current body of literature that need to be addressed in the possible domains for future investigation?

Overall, the literature indicates several significant gaps that require more investigation. Kocaman and Cosgun (2024) argue that comprehensive models are necessary to incorporate the knowledge acquired from diverse studies and scenarios. Tucker et al. (2018) argues that the intricate relationship among social media, political polarisation, and false news necessitates further investigation into improving data accessibility and understanding the varied nature of online political information. Zhuravskaya et al. (2020) discuss the temporal evolution of online political influence in both democratic and authoritarian political regimes.

By addressing these knowledge deficiencies, we may get deeper insights into the impact of news and social media on political behaviour and election outcomes. This, in turn, will enable the development of more effective political strategies and enhance the democratic decision-making process through better-informed citizens. To gain a deeper understanding of the impact of social media on political behaviour, further research should concentrate on specific pivotal domains. Longitudinal studies are necessary to investigate the impact of social media usage on political behaviour and voter participation over an extended period, particularly when examining various voting systems and demographic groups. Additionally, it is crucial to investigate the impact of voters' partisan biases developed on social media on their long-term comprehension of political matters. It is crucial to investigate the variations in biases across different platforms and political contexts. Considering the ethical implications of utilising social media data to predict voting behaviour is crucial, particularly regarding privacy concerns and potential biases in data collection and analysis Further investigation is required to examine the impact of various news types on distinct market sectors and the role of social media in these dynamics. We must consider a broader range of case studies. Additionally, conducting further investigation into the mechanics of echo chambers across various online platforms and political contexts, as well as exploring their role in reinforcing online political perspectives and potential strategies to combat misinformation, would be beneficial. Examining the problem from the perspectives of political science, communication studies, and economics will provide a comprehensive understanding of how social media influences political behaviour due to its multidisciplinary nature. Incorporating these recommendations will enhance existing knowledge and optimise the effectiveness of political strategies and democratic procedures.

CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

Social media has become a critical aspect of youth's lives, influencing their behaviour, identity, and political engagement. Platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and Twitter serve as more than just entertainment; they are essential venues for political discourse and self-expression. Research shows that social media empowers youth to voice opinions, form communities, and engage politically, often bypassing traditional media and political institutions.

Beyond engagement, social media plays a significant role in identity and community formation. Youth use these platforms to explore identities and connect with like-minded individuals, which is especially valuable for marginalized groups. Active social media use can enhance critical thinking, community involvement, and political participation, contributing to democratic processes.

This study uses a systematic literature review (SLR) to thoroughly examine these themes. The SLR approach identifies trends, theoretical frameworks, and research gaps by focusing on five main questions: the scholarly background of current studies, underlying theoretical frameworks, main topics addressed, literature gaps, and potential areas for future research. By analyzing studies from the past two decades, the review offers a foundational reference for future academic work.

Key findings reveal that social media enhances political engagement by personalizing politics and facilitating direct connections between candidates and voters. However, its impact on voter turnout and long-term effects requires more research. Social media exposure increases political knowledge but may reinforce partisan biases, highlighting the need for further study on bias development across platforms. The predictive power of minimal social media interactions, like a single Facebook like, on voting behaviour underscores the potential of social media data in forecasting electoral outcomes, though ethical concerns and data biases demand additional scrutiny. The relationship between news and financial markets, as shown by events like data breaches, affects market volatility, necessitating research into how different types of news influence various market sectors and the role of social media in these dynamics. Finally, while the influence of echo chambers on voting behaviour is debated, exposure to diverse viewpoints is common, suggesting the need to understand and counteract online reinforcement of political sentiments.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

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